THE ELEVENTH ELEGY

OF BOOK V

OF

SEXTUS PROPERTIUS

WITH

A VERSE-TRANSLATION

BY

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CLASS OF 1900

AMHERST COLLEGE

LATIN DEPARTMENT

MDCCCC

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NOTE.

Two prizes were recently offered to the members of the senior class for the best metrical versions of the last of the elegies of the Augustan author Propertius, whose poems have not been read in class here for a number of years.

The version for which was assigned the first prize by the committee of award, together with the text of the original, is printed in this form through the liberality of a loyal alumnus, as a token of his interest in Latin studies at Amherst.

E. P. CROWELL.

AMHERST COLLEGE, June, 1900.

THE elegiac couplet was naturalized in Latin literature during the Augustan age. Of the elegiac poets of the period, Sextus Propertius is the most eminent. His works are comprehended in five books, from the last of which the following rendering is made.

This poem presents Cornelia, a member of the highest circle of Rome, delivering from the under-world an elegy upon her own death. It is not arranged by consistent plan, the address turning now to the immediate Plutonian court, now to friends on earth. The former are called upon to assure the future because of the latter's vindication of the past. It has been conjectured that the verses were intended to adorn the mausoleum of the deceased (*cf.* v. 36).

Critical opinion has always assigned to this elegiac the highest rank not alone among the works of its author, but as well in all productions of its like in the literature. It has been called "the queen of elegies." Mackail declares that in it "art passes beyond the reach of criticism." Ramsay pronounces it "a magnificent poem" and refers to its "noble stateliness." The somewhat malapropos flattery of Augustus is but too characteristic of the time.

SEXTUS PROPERTIUS:

BOOK V; ELEGY XI.

LIBER V: ELEGIA XI.

Desine, Paulle, meum lacrimis urgere sepulcrum:
  panditur ad nullas ianua nigra preces.

Cum semel infernas intrarunt funera leges,
  non exorato stant adamante viae.

Te licet orantem fuscae deus audiat aulae:
  nempe tuas lacrimas litora surda bibent.

Vota movent superos: ubi portitor aera recepit,
  obserat herbosos lurida porta rogos.

Sic maestae cecinere tubae, cum subdita nostrum
  detraheret lecto fax inimica caput.

Quid mihi coniugium Paulli, quid currus avorum
  profuit aut famae pignora tanta meae?

Num minus inmites habui Cornelia Parcas?
  en sum, quod digitis quinque levatur, onus.

Damnatae noctes et vos vada lenta paludes,
  et quaecumque meos inplicat unda pedes,

inmatura licet, tamen huc non noxia veni:
  det pater hic umbrae mollia iura meae.

BOOK V: ELEGY XI.

Cease, Paullus, weeping to beset my tomb;
  To no petition opes the mournful door.
When once the shade has sought the nether gloom,
  Unyielding bars restrain it evermore.

The god may hearken in his dusky hall,
  Yet must submit him to relentless fate;
Heaven may attend you, but your tears will fall
  In vain for those who pass beyond the gate.

Naught have the living but the grass-grown mound
  Wherein repose the ashes of the dead:
Such the sad burden of the trumpet's sound
  As flames were closing round my sunken head.

There was no honour Paullus could bestow,
  No claim ancestral that I might adjust,
To stay the progress of the Fates; and lo!
  A single hand encompasses my dust.

Nights of the damned, and every sluggish mere
  And fenland cumbering my feet with sludge,
Ill-timed but upright do I enter here:
  Then let the father be a kindly judge.

Aut si quis posita iudex sedet Aeacus urna,
  in mea sortita vindicet ossa pila:

adsideant fratres, iuxta Minoida sellam
  Eumenidum intento turba severa foro:

Sisyphe, mole vaces, taceant Ixionis orbes,
  fallax Tantaleo corripiare liquor,

Cerberus et nullas hodie petat improbus umbras,
  et iaceat tacita lapsa catena sera.

Ipsa loquar pro me: si fallo, poena sororum
  infelix humeros urgeat urna meos.

Si cui fama fuit per avita tropaea decori,
  Afra Numantinos regna loquuntur avos,

altera maternos exaequat turba Libones,
  et domus est titulis utraque fulta suis.

Mox, ubi iam facibus cessit praetexta maritis,
  vinxit et acceptas altera vitta comas,

iungor, Paulle, tuo sic discessura cubili:
  in lapide hoc uni nupta fuisse legar.

Testor maiorum cineres tibi, Roma, verendos,
  sub quorum titulis, Africa, tonsa iaces,

et Persen proavi simulantem pectus Achillis
  quique tuas proavo fregit Achille domos,

If I persuade not by my own report,
  By chosen jurors let my cause be tried;
The Furies tarry in the listening court,
  The Cretan brethren o'er the test preside.

Grant to the tortured for a space release
  From bootless labour and eternal pain;
Bid Hades' sentry hold to-day his peace
  And fret no longer at his noisy chain.

Myself in person shall present the plea
  At the tribunal; an I speak not true,
Upon my shoulders rest the penalty
  Assigned the perjured, as my hateful due.

Do lineal trophies ornament a name?
  Then Spain and Carthage to my sires attest.
Nor less the lustre of maternal fame;
  Alike the houses on their titles rest.

With other vestures for the ones I wore,
  Another chaplet bound about my head,
Thine, Paullus, I became forevermore;
  Read writ above me that but one I wed.

Upon the hallowed shrine of Scipio,
  With Afric sitting at its base in thrall;
And his who conquered at a single blow
  The might of Perses,—on the twain I call.

me neque censurae legem mollisse nec ulla
labe mea vestros erubuisse focos.

Non fuit exuviis tantis Cornelia damnum:
quin erat et magnae pars imitanda domus.

Nec mea mutata est aetas, sine crimine tota est:
viximus insignes inter utramque facem.

Mi natura dedit leges a sanguine ductas,
ne possem melior iudicis esse metu.

Quaelibet austeras de me ferat urna tabellas:
turpior assessu non erit ulla meo,

vel tu, quae tardam movisti fune Cybeben,
Claudia, turritae rara ministra deae,

vel cui, commissos cum Vesta reposceret ignes,
exhibuit vivos carbasus alba focos.

Nec te, dulce caput, mater Scribonia, laesi:
in me mutatum quid nisi fata velis?

Maternis laudor lacrimis urbisque querellis,
defensa et gemitu Caesaris ossa mea.

Ille sua nata dignam vixisse sororem
increpat, et lacrimas vidimus ire deo.

Et tamen emerui generosos vestis honores,
nec mea de sterili facta rapina domo.

For me no censor turned the law aside,
  Nor does your hearthstone wrong of mine confess.
I brought no stigma on your noble pride—
  Myself the pattern of its nobleness.

Unchanged, unfailing on my way I went;
  Abode commended till my dying day;—
My guide my conscience through my life's extent,
  Unmoved by terror, and beyond its sway.

Though harshest sentence be pronounced on me,
  No soul will shun me with a proud disdain:
Not thou that movedst stranded Cybele
  When others laboured at the ropes in vain;

Not thou that sudden madest flames to start
  When Vesta charged thee to restore thy trust.
And, mother, never have I grieved thy heart,
  Save that I perished, as perforce I must.

A mother and a city mourn me dead;
  My urn is hallowed by a Caesar's grief.
All Rome beheld the godlike tears he shed,
  That life so worthy should be made so brief.

When death approached to fasten on his prize,
  Two sons survived me in the home bereft;
Supported by their arms I closed my eyes;
  They are my solace in the land I left.

Tu, Lepide, et tu, Paulle, meum post fata levamen,
  condita sunt vestro lumina nostra sinu.

Vidimus et fratrem sellam geminasse curulem,
  consule quo facto tempore rapta soror.

Filia, tu specimen censurae nata paternae,
  fac teneas unum nos imitata virum,

et serie fulcite genus: mihi cymba volenti
  solvitur aucturis tot mea fata meis.

Haec est feminei merces extrema triumphi,
  laudat ubi emeritum libera fama rogum.

Nunc tibi commendo communia pignora natos:
  haec cura et cineri spirat inusta meo.

Fungere maternis vicibus, pater: illa meorum
  omnis erit collo turba ferenda tuo.

Oscula cum dederis tua flentibus, adice matris:
  tota domus coepit nunc onus esse tuum.

Et si quid doliturus eris, sine testibus illis:
  cum venient, siccis oscula falle genis.

Sat tibi sint noctes, quas de me, Paulle, fatiges,
  somniaque in faciem credita saepe meam:

atque ubi secreto nostra ad simulacra loqueris,
  ut responsurae singula verba iace.

Twice sat my brother in the chair of state,
  There was he seated when my day was done;
The censor's rule, my daughter, illustrate;
  Like me, remember that you wed but one.

The sombre barque is fitting now to leave,
  And I am ready, — my repose I crave.
No fairer honour may a wife receive
  Than fame's soft fragrance shed above her grave.

Whom I relinquish I to you consign;
  Solicitude breathes in my ashes yet.
Now varied services in you combine,
  And on your shoulders many cares are met.

A mother's kisses with your own bestow;
  On you henceforward all the house must lean.
If aught you sorrow, do not let them know,
  Nor weeping, suffer that your tears be seen.

Enough to pass long vigils of distress,
  And trust in visions that you see me nigh;
My image oft in solitude address,
  As if the lips could proffer you reply.

But if with passing years a change succeed,
  And set a stranger in my wonted place, —
Children, show kindness in your word and deed,
  For only kindness will secure her grace.

Seu tamen adversum mutarit ianua lectum,
sederit et nostro cauta noverca toro,

coniugium, pueri, laudate et ferte paternum:
capta dabit vestris moribus illa manus.

Nec matrem laudate nimis: collata priori
vertet in offensas libera verba suas.

Seu memor ille mea contentus manserit umbra
et tanti cineres duxerit esse meos,

discite venturam iam nunc sentire senectam,
caelibis ad curas nec vacet ulla via.

Quod mihi detractum est, vestros accedat ad annos:
prole mea Paullum sic iuvet esse senem.

Et bene habet: numquam mater lugubria sumpsi:
venit in exequias tota caterva meas.

Causa perorata est. Flentes me surgite, testes,
dum pretium vitae grata rependit humus.

Moribus et caelum patuit: sim digna merendo,
cuius honoratis ossa vehantur equis.

Speak not o'ermuch of me in praiseful strain,
  Lest it offend the jealous heart to hear;
But if some memories he yet retain,
  Or hold my ashes in regard so dear, —

Add to your years those holden years of mine,
  Each wish and frailty of your sire forestall;
Lend brightsomeness unto his day's decline,
  Permit no cares athwart his path to fall.

I rest content; for though my span was brief,
  I am emboldened not to deem it vain.
For none of mine I wore the weeds of grief,
  And none were missing from my funeral train.

My cause is plead. Sad witnesses, arise,
  And for the verdict on my life prepare.
So worth accord an access to the skies,
  My soul shall find triumphant entrance there.